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Editorial: Trump, Carson court bigotry

Kokomo Tribune Editorial Board

THE ISSUE

GOP candidates Donald Trump and Dr. Ben Carson have courted anti-Muslim bigotry.

OUR VIEW

Unlike Republicans of yore, these candidates have embraced this mean-spirited constituency.

It was Oct. 10, 2008, and the presidential election was less than a month away. Republican candidate Sen. John McCain was attending a town hall meeting in Lakeville, Minnesota, when the microphone was passed to supporter Gayle Quinnell. She said she couldn't trust then Democratic nominee Sen. Barack Obama because he was an "Arab." At this, McCain shook his head vigorously and snatched the microphone back. "No, ma'am," he said.

Ten days later, former Secretary of State Colin Powell made an appearance on NBC's "Meet the Press" to condemn this particular conspiracy theory. After affirming Obama was indeed a Christian, Powell went further. "The

really right answer is: What if he is? Is there something wrong with being a Muslim in this country? The answer is, no," he said Oct. 20, 2008. "That's not America."

Fast forward to the current campaign cycle, and another Republican presidential hopeful taking questions at a town hall. Current GOP front-runner Donald Trump was standing before a crowd Sept. 18 in Rochester, New Hampshire, when a supporter took to the microphone. "We have a problem in this country, and it's called Muslims," the man said. "We know our current president is one. We know he's not even American." But instead of taking the high road as McCain and Powell had done seven years prior, Trump laughed. "Right," he said affirmingly, before chuckling. "We need this question!"

Two days later, "Meet the Press" once again took this line of inquiry to yet another Republican candidate. GOP candidate Dr. Ben Carson has been polling second only to Trump in recent weeks, and NBC's Chuck Todd asked him if faith should matter to voters. "I guess it depends on what that faith is," said Carson. "If it's inconsistent with the values and principles of America, then of course it should matter. But if it fits within the realm of America and [is] consistent with the Constitution, no problem." Todd asked if Islam fit the bill. "I would not advocate that we put a Muslim in charge of this nation," said Carson. "I absolutely would not agree with that."

Unlike more establishment Republicans like Powell and McCain, these outsiders with no government experience aren't eschewing fact-free bigotry. Quite to the contrary: they are downright courting it. Granted, we are still in primary season when candidates speak to the base of the party instead of attempting to broaden their appeal to a general audience, but as Americans we should be ever wary of this small-minded pandering.